

5880

Robt Bourne
M.D. 1790—

4135. d. 49

AN
E S S A Y
ON THE
O R I G I N,
CHARACTER AND VIEWS
OF THE
PROTESTANT DISSENTERS.

Decipimur specie recti. *Horace.*

Ill-weaved Ambition. *Shakespeare.*

O X F O R D,

PRINTED FOR D. PRINCE AND J. COOKE.

J. F. AND C. RIVINGTON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD;

J. AND T. EGERTON, CHARING CROSS, LONDON.

M DCC XC,

ESSAY

OF THE
CHARACTER AND VIEWS

PROTESTANT DISSENTERS



TO
THE PARLIAMENT
OF
GREAT BRITAIN
THE FOLLOWING ESSAY
IS
WITH MUCH DEFERENCE
INSCRIBED BY
THE AUTHOR.

TO
THE PARLIAMENT
OF
GREAT BRITAIN



THE FOLIO ESSAY

IS

WITH MUCH DIFFERENCE

INSCRIBED BY

THE AUTHOR.

INTRODUCTION.

AS an Introduction to the following Essay, the reader is presented with an abstract from the History of that body of Men, to which it particularly relates.

ONE of the most eminent Uses of History is, that it delivers such lessons to Mankind, as may supply them with a Warning against future Misfortunes, by the Detail of past Calamities. An advantage of this nature will be derived from a survey of the civil and political conduct of the Protestant Dissenters, deduced from that period, in which they became possessed of influence in the State.

THE faithful Statement of Events, it is apprehended, must in some passages amount to a severe Invective: but the reader will not thence suppose, that it is our design by a representation, which conveys a censure upon the Dissenters with respect to their civil and political conduct, either to deny or depreciate the Virtues of those particular Characters of their Sect, whose Piety and Learning have done honour to human nature.

IN the reign of Elizabeth, the Dissenters first appeared considerable in this Kingdom; but their efforts were repressed by her resolute spirit, and by the wisdom of her administration. At this period, therefore, they could only meditate innovations, inveigh against the Government, and insult the Members of the Established Church.^a The

^a Hume, Vol. IV. p. 656.

learned

learned and pious James wanted the political genius of his predecessor, and vainly endeavoured to appease and reform the Dissenters, by his exertions of reasoning and persuasion. But they were to be managed by a Statesman, not converted by a Divine: hence the errors of his Government rendered him unable to resist the violent attempts of the Dissenters, who, at this interval, assumed a higher tone, began to attack their Opposers and effect their purposes.^b

THE Mischiefs, which had been thus engendered in the time of his predecessors, at length broke forth in the unhappy reign of Charles. In an arduous conjuncture, that Monarch was unsupported by firmness in his own Resolves, and unassisted by Wisdom in his Counsellors. Rash and unjustifiable

^b Hume, Vol.V. p. 61, 83, 84.

Measures disgraced his public proceedings, and reduced him to such extremities, that all the virtues which adorned his Character could not retrieve his affairs.^c An opportunity of prosecuting their designs now presented itself to the Dissenters: they seized it with avidity. Their violence was inflamed to a pitch of unrelenting fury; and they devoted their King to destruction, at the same time that they subverted those Institutions, of which He was the guardian and the essence. The Solemn League and Covenant enhanced the public Misfortunes by one of the most destructive combinations, in which Men have ever combined themselves against the lives and liberties of their fellow-subjects: it is distinguished by an infamous instance of

^c Hume, Vol.V. p. 159.

avarice and treachery, and stained by the blood of the generous and brave Montrose. Abetted by these circumstances, a Civil War carried havock through the nation.

THE Parliament also with hasty zeal had proceeded to the impeachment of Men, whose opinions were at least justifiable, and whose Conduct was spotless; as if determined to sacrifice upon the block that virtue, which came not within the ravages of the sword.^d The Constitution and the Church presented the grand ruins of the general wreck, the very authors of which were at length involved in their own work of desolation. It was but a slight remove from the violence of the Puritans to the licentiousness of the Independents; a dis-

^d Hume, Vol. V. p. 316.

avowal

avowal of the “ beggarly elements of
 “ justice and humanity ” was a natural
 consequence of the violation of divine
 and human Laws. Independency, there-
 fore, was an extreme of Puritanism,
 it consisted of the same hypocrisy re-
 fined, and of the same intemperance
 unrestrained : the great examples of it
 united consummate policy with un-
 limited boldness.* By these qualifica-
 tions the Independents obtained and
 exercised an excess of power, which
 overcame the original Dissenters, and
 converted disorder into Tyranny.

THE business of devastation was now
 complete ; the Dissenters had sacrificed
 those rights, for which they had con-
 tended, and were reduced to their for-

* Vide Characters of Cromwell and Vane.

mer State of restless and unavailing Ambition.

DEFEATED by the destructive consequences of their own Efforts; wavering in their circumstances, but still firm in their Antipathies, they acceded to the Measures of James the Second, and thus united themselves even with the Catholics, forsaking the interests of their religion in order to indulge their Animosity. The Dissenters however, adhered to the Catholic cause only while the Power of its leader prevailed; they accommodated themselves with great facility to the vicissitudes of Fortune; and appear within a short period, at one time the Partizans of James the Second, at another the encouragers of his Rival. There remains another Event in the Annals of this Country, in which
the

the Character of the Dissenters is conspicuous, it is too recent to be now insisted upon; the recollection of it awakens solicitude and terror.

^f See Mr. Fox's Speech upon the Test Act, 1787.



RELIGION and LEGISLATION comprehend the most important Duties and the dearest Interests of Mankind. Ecclesiastical and Civil Institutions are the Guardians of our Conscience and Liberty; they enable us to persevere in the due Observance of every sacred Obligation, and thus to extend our Views beyond the prospect of a perishable Welfare. These Duties and these Interests are eminently important: Every concern, that relates to them, demands our most serious attention: Every proceeding that endangers them, arouses our Apprehensions.

Under these impressions, the subsequent view of the Dissenters is presented to the Public: It comprehends a concise Account of their Principles; investigated from their Origin; examined, in order to shew their Inconsistency with a System of good

A

Govern-

Government in Church and State, and considered with respect to their present Operations and Tendency.

The Discussion of this Subject is highly interesting to Liberality, Patriotism, and Christianity : By the Circumstances which it displays, and by the Disposition of Mind which it inculcates, it is calculated, to exalt our Benevolence towards Mankind, to cherish the Love of our Country, and to rivet our Attachment to the venerable Establishment of a pure and enlightened Church.

The Reformation was effected in an Age, when the Minds of some of its Converts, from their uncultivated state, were unqualified to discriminate between the different forms of religious observances. In a period of mental rudeness the Appeal of truth may force itself upon the Senses, but it can have little influence over the Understanding. Hence the Advantages of present comfort, which the Reformation imparted ; and the animating Prospects of future happiness, which it unfolded, impressed themselves with
an

an irresistible Energy upon the perception of the early protestants; while the internal Evidence and Beauty of the System, which it vindicated, lay beyond the general Reach of their Comprehension. By inculcating a practice of Religious Duties, which were not subject to the cruel and imperious Jurisdiction of Rome, the Reformation brought relief from the terrors of Papal Power; and by pointing out a means of Salvation, uncontaminated by secular corruptions, it gave birth to an exalted, though inadequate, Conception of the real excellence of Christianity.

But these glorious benefits overcame the weak and unsettled judgment of some unenlightened Followers of the Protestant Faith, and hurried them to an ungovernable Enthusiasm. ^a An inveteracy against the Catholics now united itself with the fervors of a Religious Zeal, and thus was produced the extravagant and pernicious spirit of Fanaticism. ^b From these disorderly effects of religious influence, arose the first principles of Dissention from the Established

^a Hume's Hist. vol. 4. p. 421.

^b Ibid. p. 506.

Church. An abhorrence of every thing that bore even the most distant resemblance to Popery appears to have been combined by the Dissenters with an impatience of all controul which restrained their enormities. *The Established Church therefore became obnoxious to them, because its Discipline, in some unessential particulars, was similar to that prescribed by the Roman Ritual ; but more especially because its Government enjoined a Conformity to which their intolerant temper could not bend itself. Their Objections for obvious reasons were first to the Discipline ; they have since questioned the Authorities of the English Church. To inveigh against external Observances required neither depth of Learning nor solidity of Judgment : the Illiterate and Infatuated could comprehend objects of this nature, and distort them with virulent exaggeration, or deride them with unmeaning abuse : But to question the principles upon which they were founded, and to dispute the Doctrines of the Established Church, demanded an improvement of fa-

* Hume, vol. 4. p. 508. Vol. 5. p. 224.

culties and all the Arts and Address of Sophistry. A ^d Zealot, or an ^e Impostor, could revile an Ecclesiastical Institution, which repressed his ambition, and quelled his turbulence: But a Scholar and a Disputant still find it an arduous task to pervert its excellence and arraign its Authorities.

Such was the Origin of the Principles of the Dissenters. Their religious Conduct was marked by an intemperate Zeal, which, in its stronger ascendancy, hurried them to phrenzy; in its milder operations, overcast their Minds with a gloomy and unsocial Spirit. The tendency of these dispositions was promoted and confirmed by real or affected apprehensions of Papal treachery and Papal ^f Invasion; by the errors of the Established Church, in its gradual approaches to Perfection; and by the plausible pretext of maintaining Religious Liberty. These are the Motives which produced the Exertions of the Dissenters in behalf of their Tenets:

^d Fuller's Church Hist. Lib. 9. p. 174.

^e Ibid. p. 207.

^f Hume, vol. 5. p. 222.

The efficacy of their endeavours was constituted, not by the virtue of their own Cause, but by the unessential inaccuracies, of That which they opposed. A discord in the tide of harmony, or a deformity in an Assemblage of beauties, is aggravated by the nature of its situation. Thus an impropriety, amid the general consistency of the English Church, appeared conspicuously erroneous, and the Dissenters did not fail to reprehend it in a stile of acrimony, that might reflect credit on their own superior circumspection. But the lustre of general excellence is not sullied by the exposure of a particular error. The Artist, who neglects the loveliest Features of the creation, and by a selection of imperfections composes a monster, may engage the Admiration of the Curious, but cannot degrade the Majesty of Nature.

The rise, nature, and prevalence, of the Dissenters are thus comprehensively stated: The Effects they have produced in Society will appear in the examination of their Character. Their Zeal for Privilege, rendered them

them the firm Opposers of the Encroachments of prerogative : and if they had stopt there, Patriotism would have idolized their memory. Their earnestness in the support of the Protestant Faith made them vigilant guardians against the insidiousness, and against the power, of the Catholics : and if they had closed their career with these Exertions, Christianity would have classed them among her useful Advocates. But under the pretext of maintaining their privileges and defending the protestant Cause, they were actuated, by an Impatience of legal restraint, by an insatiable desire of power, and by an Antipathy to a form of Government, which protected the Established Church. In the proceedings which resulted from these principles and pursuits, the Dissenters confounded Religion with Human policy, and employed it as a Veil for their licentiousness and outrages. It was impiously alledged, that the Cause of Christianity demanded and sanctioned the most unmanly and merciless measures ; that the enormities of an Usurper were suggested by divine inspiration, and that the hand of the

the Assassin was lifted at the command of Revelation: Nay the very language of our holy Scripture was prostituted to the purposes of a cruel malignity. Appointed to exalt the Virtues, and to establish the happiness of Man, it was perverted, in order to brand him with Infamy, and destroy him by Anathemas. We recur with horror to the dreadful denunciations, and the bitter "Curse of Meroz," which were thus applied to the Members of the Established Church. When from the common incentives to the commission of crimes, an offender violates divine and human laws, he stands an odious and defenceless criminal; and while he destroys Himself by his Guilt, he may preserve others by his example: But when the fraudulent and violent usurp the sacred names of Religion and Liberty, to defend their treachery, and cruelty; when piety and patriotism are held up, in the justification of sedition and regicide, Enthusiasm sanctifies iniquity, and mischiefs equally rapid in their progress, and ruinous in their tendency, invade the welfare of Society. We have too forcible an exemplification

plification of the truth of the foregoing observation in the annals of this Country : The miseries in which it was involved by the Dissenters, form one of the darkest pictures in the whole catalogue of human calamity. We behold a body of Men, impelled by baneful and unjust motives, to rash and sanguinary transactions, at one time furious and vindictive, at another timid and fluctuating. We behold them subverting the constitution, by a mockery of its nature, by the violation of its laws, and by the murder of its Supporters : we behold them, by a series of obdurate and unparalleled outrages, rendering the nation a scene of uproar and carnage : we behold them, in a subsequent period still nourishing the spirit of discord, and joining the very machinations of Rome against the religion and laws of their native land. At this retrospect of a nation distracted by intestine tumults, and bathed in the blood of her best and bravest sons, humanity shrinks with horrors ; but the Briton, who feels for all that is dear to him upon earth, must be affected by the complicated ascendancy of regret
ior

for the past calamities, and of anxiety for the future prosperity of his Country : While the particular advantages of its institutions, fill his own mind with exultation, and while the general excellence and beauty of its Constitution excite the admiration of mankind, he will undergo an accumulated solicitude for their safety and permanence ; and his emotions, though of a more powerful tendency, will resemble those of the lover of elegant art, who, while he recurs to the ruins of the Capitol, trembles for the fate of Saint Peters.

The principles of the Dissenters are as incompatible with a good system of Ecclesiastical and Civil Government in their Nature, as they have been fatal to such Institutions in their Effects. Ecclesiastical Laws are necessary for the enforcement and for the proper observance of Christian Duties. The virtue of such Laws, depends upon their Fundamentals and their Administration. If the former are sound, and the latter is just, they are distinguished by energy, efficacy, and stability. Institutes of this character can
only

only be constructed upon approved Principles, and maintained by unerring Motives; they must be founded upon moderation and benevolence, and their Supporters must be actuated by a chearful compliance with necessary subordination, and by opinions entirely consistent with the Injunctions of Revelation. But it has been demonstrated, that the principles of the Dissenters are devoid of this moderation and benevolence, and that their Motives are strong prejudices and violent Antipathies. Their present conduct indeed confirms this Position: the unremitting Assiduity with which they disseminate Invectives against the Church Establishment, and the industry with which they excite each other to an opposition of the necessary Laws of this Realm, argue a temper, inimical to all order, and particularly hostile to Religious Subordination.^d Consequently when the presbyterian form of Church Government was established in this Kingdom, it proved itself ineffectual: It was disgraced by internal cla-

^d Vide Resolutions published in the public papers. Dr. Price's discourse.—Letter to the Bishop of Chester.

mours and dissensions, and sunk by the Conduct of its own Advocates.

Principles which are inconsistent with good Government in Ecclesiastical Departments, can scarcely be expected to coincide with the just principles of Civil and Political Institutions. No System of Government is calculated to rule and satisfy the Dissenters. Democracy requires a Sedateness and Regularity in its citizens, and suits the steady Conduct and phlegmatic temper of the Dutch. Aristocracy enjoins an implicit patience and submission, and is fitted to the Slavish soil of Italy. The genius of a limited Monarchy demands a fond attachment to the genuine spirit of the Constitution; a moderate but resolute maintenance of Privileges, and the just return of loyal affection to the Prince. But, if it could be supposed, that the Dissenters are not too much habituated to the unrivalled excellence of the British Government, to endure one of a less approved Character; the turbulence, which, has always attended their principles, would embroil a Democracy, and

and convert it into 'Anarchy ; they are too bold in the assertion of Right, to bear the extended tyranny of Aristocracy ; and in their present attempts to obtain a participation of official power and emoluments, they prefer their own particular Views to a warm attachment to the Constitution ; they substitute an unfounded claim to unconditional Advantages for a manly defence of privilege, and their public Conduct does not indicate that affectionate Gratitude, which is due to the Prince, who fills with integrity the Throne of a Free people. As this description of the Dissenters respects only their general Character, the Arguments it enforces cannot be opposed by examples of amiable Individuals. The conduct of an Individual may be regulated by his own piety and virtue ; but to establish and regulate a great System, so as to preserve its energies and beauty, secure against hostile attacks, and entire amid violent convulsions, demands universal and infallible principles, which are founded upon truth, and confirmed by Experience.

The

The Facts, which have been discussed, enable us to judge with precision and certainty concerning the present exertions of the Dissenters.

It is incontestibly proved by Writers of strong penetration and consummate Learning, that their demand upon the Legislature is not founded upon Right. We shall, therefore, consider only their Pretensions, and proceed to shew, the Inconsistency of them, their Futility, and the Manner in which they are supported, with some Remarks, upon particular Objections which have been advanced against the Corporation and Test Acts, and upon the Evils to be apprehended from a Repeal of them.

It is sufficient, in order to prove the Inconsistency of the Pretensions of the Dissenters, that they contain a requisition of unconditional Privileges. The very Idea implies an absurdity. The essence of all privileges consists, in the conditions upon which they are enjoyed ; take these away, and what
before

before was Privilege; becomes an arrogation of Power: for the common advantages which are experienced in civil society, belong to no Person, who does not subscribe to, and aid, the general System from which they result. Besides, the Dissenters cannot mean to argue for the admission of Catholics to offices in the state; for if they do, they contradict the Principles, which they have always maintained; and if they do not, their favourite Argument, the Injustice of a Disqualification upon the account of Nonconformity, is instantly done away.

Similar to the Inconsistency is the Futility, which characterizes the Claims of the Dissenters. A measure which is professedly prosecuted for the Attainment of certain Advantages, if it is incapable of producing those Advantages, must be considered as futile. The Dissenters solicit a participation of civil offices, with the expectation of deriving general utility from them; but such functions are burthen some as well as lucrative, and a general exemption from them, is, therefore, a valuable

luable immunity : Hence, as a body of men, they will, in this respect, obtain no benefits from the Repeal they request. By the attainment of gratification for the ambition of Individuals, they may acquire power ; but if that is the object, are they not cherishing unworthy Views under an unmanly pretext ? The merits of their peaceable, and well-affected conduct, are strongly insisted upon by the Dissenters. The Quakers, and the Catholics, perhaps, might better urge such a claim. The Virtue, however, of an exemplary public conduct, while punishment hangs over the violation of the public peace, is a new claim to applause.

The Manner, in which they are enforced, reflects no credit upon the Pretensions of the Dissenters. The merits of a cause must be weak indeed, when its supporters are reduced to the necessity of exacting that assistance, which ought to be voluntarily given in their favour. To extort, from the Interests of a Representative, that vote, which ought to be, the result of his judgment, is a double degrada-

degradation : It reflects the dishonour of conscious demerit, upon the Constituent, who is the author, and of humiliating distrust, upon the Member, who is the object, of such a transaction.

Misrepresentations also add to the impropriety of methods which have been adopted, in order to confirm the Claims of the Dissenters : These, by giving false colour to virtue, constitute a culpable mode of conduct : The Love of our Country is expatiated upon, by a popular Preacher of their persuasion, in a manner which accommodates it to the promotion of sinister views. But the Love of our Country awakens only the generous and manly ardour of courage and generosity, and never can prevail in conjunction with sordid motives. It is, therefore, an inexcusable jargon of Sentiment, which confounds a noble regard for the welfare of the Community with an eager pursuit of personal emoluments, and thus classes under a common description two incompatible objects.

B The

The Spirit of the Corporation and Test Acts is not peculiar to the Constitution of this Country. Such Institutes form an essential part of Legislation, and are grounded upon the fundamental principles of Government. Laws calculated to maintain an established form of religious Worship, are, in almost every nation, so closely interwoven with the Constitution that they involve the public Welfare. We may trace them in the most illustrious ages, and among the wisest nations of the World. Not all the virtues, nor all the eloquence of Socrates, could protect him, when he was accused of an offence against the religious Laws of Athens. But if the penetrating Athenians exercised a Severity for the preservation of their religious regulations, when they could only urge in their favour, the sanction of custom, and the general interests of the community, how ought Institutes of such a tendency to be preserved and venerated, when to these considerations are added an Origin unquestionably divine, and an influence more extensively beneficial? The Opposition of such Laws would be an impiety, if the delicate nature
of

of the Subjects to which they relate did not expose them to objections, for the culpability of which some excuse may be alledged. It requires, indeed, much moderation in our religious Opinions, and much temperance in our Sentiments upon Liberty, to reconcile necessary circumstances, which, even while they protect, may seem to restrain them.

The principal objections to the Corporation and Test Acts, are those which appear to have arisen from benevolence, and those which indicate a pious concern for Christian Duties. It has been alledged with a degree of philanthropy, that brave and useful Citizens are oppressed by the Corporation and Test Acts²; that a patriotic soldier, by his services, exposes himself to degrading punishments, and that an experienced merchant is debarred from promoting the prosperity, and sharing the honours of his Country. The former of these objections must refer to Vo-

² Vide Mr. Beaufoy's Speech in the House of Commons, March 1787.

lunteers; but even Volunteers are not amenable to these Laws: they bear no "office, civil or military,"^h and receive no pay.ⁱ With respect to the latter, it must be observed, that merchants, who are engaged in extending Commerce, find their industry rewarded by the advantages it affords them; and their accumulation of wealth, though it furnishes them with the means of obtaining, invests them with no claim to civil authority.

But a heavier objection lies against the Test Act. It is urged that it occasions the profanation of a Ceremony which ought to be contemplated only with veneration,^k and we proceed with deference, to obviate an imputation so disgraceful to the discipline of our Church. If the Duties of a Minister of the Established Church direct him to remonstrate with men of profligate lives, they do not instruct him to exclude such persons from an act of reformation. The Communicant avows the purity of his motives, before he

^h Blackstone's Comment. Vol. p. 58. ⁱ Stat. 25 Charles 2. c. 2. ^k Mr. Beaufoy's Speech in the House of Commons, March 1787.

approaches

approaches the altar, to pledge the Sincerity of his heart: and whatever may have been his Conduct, every partaker of the holy Communion, by that act, renounces his Vices. Assertions to the contrary, are the language not of Benevolence and Philosophy, but of Severity and Misanthropy; they are founded upon gloomy notions of human depravity, and agree better with Papal Anathemas than with the spirit of enlightened Christianity. But this objection to the Test Act, fairly considered, becomes a proof of it's Utility. If it does bring one who has been a profligate to the Communion, it thus places him in a situation of penitence, and under circumstances which are calculated to advance inadequate sentiments of Religious Duty, into confirmed habits of piety. To remain entirely unmoved, by the force and sublimity of the Sacramental Service, by such an appeal to his reason, and such a warning to his Interests, Man must be divested of an essential principle of his Nature, he must be divested of his Conscience.

But however improper may be the present

pursuit of the Dissenters, the possibility of their Success threatens the Community with the most serious consequences.

The claim of Toleration is a popular pretext. It requires but little knowledge of the human heart to discover that their real objects are the removal of ordinances which are greivous to them, and the enjoyment of public power, and public emoluments. The Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts will be a foundation for these proceedings. The Dissenters will thus accumulate authority and wealth, extend their influence through every public Channel to the House of Commons, and there, by imperceptible gradations, will fix their Standard. They will then be able to effect for themselves, what they now supplicate from the Legislature: And let the Minister who shall hope, in such a crisis of affairs, by his virtue and his wisdom, to defend his Country, remember the Fate of Strafford.¹

¹ Hume, Vol. V. p. 278.

From

From their verbal, as well as printed declarations, it appears, that the Dissenters look forward with eagerness to the abolition of Episcopacy, and the several Ecclesiastical Dignities. The Liturgy too, which is the Rule and Guardian of our religious duties, continues the object of their aversion; it may be expected therefore, that, under the power of the Dissenters, its future would correspond with it's former fate.

That true Toleration, which will remain an honourable testimony of the Benevolence and Liberality which distinguishes the present age, is also in danger of being contracted. The spirit of persecution, which accompanies the principles of the Dissenters, produces an intolerance of religious opinions. And it cannot be hoped that a Sect, who are so intemperate as to menace severe innovations, from the expectation of obtaining authority, will use moderation in the exertion of it.

History compels us to apprehend, that this body of Men, when they are possessed of sufficient

sufficient power, will attack, not only Ecclesiastical Statutes, but also other venerable institutions which obstruct their progress. The dissolution of a great branch of the Government has been thus effected; and the Members of it were deprived of their influence in the state; some of them divested of their property, while others were obliged to resign their Lives.

It would be an ungrateful and painful task to enlarge upon the particular dangers attending the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts; and the complication of Evils in which it may involve this Kingdom is sufficiently apparent. The memorials of this Nation, and the judgment of the wisest of it's present Citizens, fully evince, that every invasion of the established Religion is of a Tendency destructive to the temporal Interests of the Community: an infringement upon the pure System of our Church, is a mutilation of the beautiful Structure of our Constitution; and proceedings of such a nature have been fatal to public prosperity, and to domestic happiness.

From

From the whole of this Enquiry, we draw the following Conclusions. That the principles of the Protestant Dissenters originated in an intemperate Zeal, and in violent Antipathies to the Established Church : That they have constituted a Character, which, in its former exertions was subversive of the Welfare of Society, and which still appears inconsistent with our Ecclesiastical and Civil Institutions : And that, in their present Operations and Tendency these Principles are highly dangerous to the dearest Interests of Englishmen.

This anticipation of Evils is not the representation of a gloomy Visionary ; to allay the just apprehensions it awakens, the history of a calamitous period in the last century must be annihilated, and the very remembrance of its transactions buried in oblivion : we must also deny a general Fact, which is established by Science and Philosophy : we must deny that the same destructive Causes, under the same Situation, and attended by the same circumstances, are likely to produce the same fatal Effects.

Should

Should it be alledged, that the Revolution has fixed an impregnable Bulwark for the defence of the Constitution, it must be considered, that the most illustrious establishments have been subverted. Elizabeth delivered down to her Successors a Form of Government, which imparted all the blessings that constitute national happiness and prosperity; but it perished in the melancholy troubles which she had anticipated.^m Should it be urged, that, from the present State of Affairs, there is scarcely a possibility of such Events, it must not be forgotten that many momentous transactions have originated in slight circumstances; that the dissatisfactions which prevailed in the reign of Edward the Sixth were a prelude to the Storm of Misery which burst upon the head of Charles. The spark, when awakened from its embers, kindled into a flame, and then blazed forth into a conflagration.

The present purpose is not to accuse the Dissenters of a Design to bring so much ca-

^m Hume, Vol. IV. p. 529.

lamity upon their Country; the four and unjust mind of a Misanthrope could alone suspect a body of Men, among whom there are so many worthy and amiable Members, of such cruel depravity: in the general esteem we have for human integrity, it must be believed that their Intentions are upright. But Men are not in practice the same, as they are in Speculation; their Views of things are the result of their Understanding alone; their Conduct is directed by their understanding, their temper, and their passions.

The validity of the Facts we have ascertained does not rest upon the force and propriety of this representation; they are confirmed by the wisdom and experience of ages, by the particular institutions and annals of this Nation, by the sacred and immutable evidence of truth.

Their Country, therefore, calls upon the Dissenters, in the name of brotherly love, and Christian kindness, to prevent all occasion of contest, by attending without prejudice to
the

the dictates of Religion and Reason : she appeals to the decision of their judgement ; she summons the affections of their hearts ; she refers their talents to the contemplation of divine truth ; she exhorts their disposition to the practice of humanity.

The venerable Fabric of our Established Church, and the illustrious System of our Laws, will then stand upon the solid and permanent basis of public Unanimity : Religion will then shine forth in its brightest purity, and Government flourish in its strongest efficacy. Nor will the advantages terminate here ; a more glorious benefit is justly to be expected ; the Protestant Faith will hence prevail by the force of its example, as well as by the exclusive excellence of its doctrines ; and its Advocates will proceed with new energy, to reform the errors of delusion, enlighten the darkness of ignorance, and extend the influence of Christianity as far as there is language to convey, and intellect to perceive its perfection.

But

But the Nation, before these hopes can be indulged, in her sollicitude looks up to the Parliament; to that high and solemn tribunal, upon whose decisions depend all momentous circumstances of public concern; and under whose protection Britons have placed all their rights, with an unlimited confidence. It is hence the promoter of their interests in the time of prosperity, and the defender of their liberties in the hour of peril. And never was there more need of its power and precaution than at the present conjuncture. Every good subject, therefore, must be warmly excited to add his efforts to the vigilance and wisdom of Parliament; and may be allowed to express his anxious wishes for the success of its endeavours, to advance his Country in Prosperity, and to preserve it in Peace.

F I N I S.

But the Nation, before these hopes can be
 indulged, in her solicitude looks up to the
 Parliament, to that high and solemn tribunal,
 upon whose decisions depend all momentous
 circumstances of public concern; and under
 whose protection Britons have placed all their
 rights, with an unlimited confidence. It is
 hence the promoter of their interests in the
 time of prosperity, and the defender of their
 liberties in the hour of peril. And never
 was there more need of its power and pro-
 caution than at the present conjuncture.
 Every good subject, therefore, must be warmly
 excited to add the vigilance and
 wisdom of Parliament; and may be allowed
 to express his anxious wishes for the success
 of its endeavours, to advance his Country in
 Prosperity, and to preserve it in Peace.

12 MR 53

